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AUTHOR	Rand, Michael R.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

For the year 1987, 24.4 % of American households were touched by crime. A household is considered touched by crime if during the year it was affected by a burglarly, auto theft, or household theft or if a household member was raped, robbed, or assaulted or was a victim of personal theft, no matter where the crime occurred. These offenses, which include attempted as well as completed crimes, were measured by the National Crime Survey. One in four American households was touched by a crime of violence or theft in 1987, the same proportion as in the previous 2 years. Except for personal theft, which was slightly lower in 1987 than in 1985, there was no measureable difference in 1987 from either of the previous 2 years in the percentages of households touched by any of the crimes measured. Households in rural areas were touched by crime to a lesser degree in 1987 than in 1986 although crime rates did not change for urban and suburban areas. A higher percentage of black households than white households were touched by crime. Households with higher incomes were more susceptible to victimization than those with lower incomes, almost entirely because of their greater vulnerability to personal theft. Households in rural areas were least susceptible to criminal victimization, while those in urban areas were most susceptible. Households in the Northeast were the least vulnerable to crime, while households in the West were the most vulnerable. In general, the more people in a household, the greater its vulnerability to crime. Black households were more vulnerable to crimes of high concern (rape, robbery, assault) than were white households, as were households in the West more vulnerable than those in the Northeast. Trends affecting crime statistics include the move from urban to suburban and rural areas and the decrease in size of American households. The report concludes with a discussion of methodology, describing how and why statistics were gathered. (Information on publications of the Bureau of Justice Statistics is provided.) (ABL)

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Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

Households Touched by Crime, 1987

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One in 4 American households were touched by a crime of violence or theft in 1987, the same proportion as in the previous 2 years. The estimate thus remained at its lowest level since 1975, the first year it was available, when about 1 in 3 households were touched by crime. Except for personal theft, which was slightly lower in 1987 than in 1985, there was no measurable difference in 1987 from either of the previous 2 years in the percentages of households touched by any of the crimes measured: rape, robbery, assault, personal theft, household burglary, household theft, or motor vehicle theft (table 1).

The term "household" as used in this report refers to a dwelling unit (usually a house or apartment) and the people who occupy it. A household is considered "touched by crime" if during the year it was affected by a burglary, auto theft, or household theft or if a household member was raped, robbed, or assaulted or was a victim of personal theft, no matter where the crime occurred. These offenses, which include attempted as well as completed crimes, are measured by the National Crime Survey (NCS), the source of this report.

Almost 5% of the Nation's households had a member who was the victim of a violent crime in 1987. Five percent of all households were burglarized at least once during the year, and 17% had a completed or attempted theft. Approximately 3% of U.S. households were victims of both personal and household crimes, and about 1% of households were touched by both personal theft and violence. These estimates were unchanged from 1986.

Households touched by selected crimes of violence and theft, 1975-87

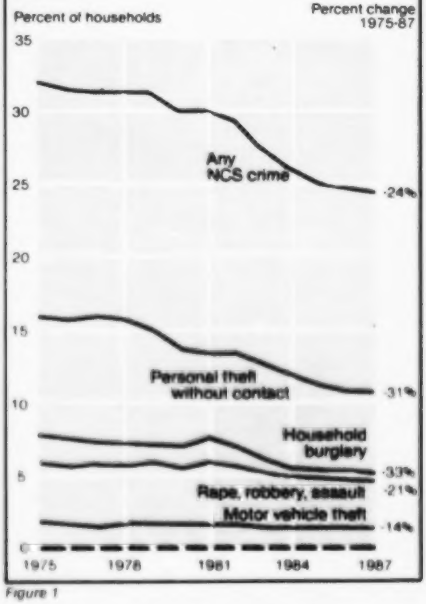

Figure 1

In 1987, as in earlier years, households with high incomes, households in urban areas, and black households were more vulnerable to crime than others. During 1987, 28% of black households, 27% of households with incomes of $25,000 or more, and 29% of urban households were touched by crime.

As in 1986, Hispanic households were more vulnerable to crime than non-Hispanic households; households in the Northeast were the least vulnerable to crime (19%), while those in the West were the most vulnerable (29%). About 25% of the households in the Midwest and 24% of the households in the South were touched by crime in 1987.[1]

May 1988

This marks the eighth year that BJS has published this bulletin. As in the previous 2 years, about 1 in 4 American households experienced a rape, robbery, assault, burglary, or theft. This is well below the almost 1 in 3 households touched by crime in 1975. Although the number of households in the United States increased by 18 million since 1975, the actual number of households touched by crime has fallen by more than a million.

Clearly, crime remains high in our society. Nevertheless, during the past decade, progress has been made in reducing the threat to households of being touched by crime.

Steven R. Schlesinger
Director

Trends

This year was only the second year since 1981 in which the percentage of households touched by crime did not decrease significantly from the previous year (figure 1). Since its inception in 1975, the proportion of households touched by crime has never shown a year-to-year increase. More than a million fewer households were

[1] 1986 was the first year that these characteristics were examined.

Table 1. Households touched by crime, 1987, and relative percent change since 1986

Households	1986 Number of households	1986 Percent	1987 Number of households	1987 Percent	Relative percent change 1986-87*
Total	90,014,000	100%	91,365,000	100%	
Touched by					
Any NCS crime	22,201,000	24.7	22,254,000	24.4	-1.2%
Violent crime	4,225,000	4.7	4,190,000	4.6	-2.1
Rape	121,000	.1	108,000	.1	-7.7
Robbery	843,000	.9	884,000	1.0	3.2
Assault	3,464,000	3.8	3,378,000	3.7	-3.9
Aggravated	1,253,000	1.4	1,256,000	1.4	-.7
Simple	2,498,000	2.7	2,374,000	2.6	-2.6
Total theft	15,583,000	17.3	15,667,000	17.1	-.9
Personal	10,098,000	11.2	10,074,000	11.0	-1.7
with contact	474,000	.5	456,000	.5	-5.7
without contact	9,717,000	10.8	9,745,000	10.7	-1.1
Household	7,238,000	8.0	7,236,000	7.9	-1.5
Burglary	4,778,000	5.3	4,717,000	5.2	-2.8
Motor vehicle theft	1,216,000	1.4	1,378,000	1.5	11.9
Crimes of high concern (a rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger, or a burglary)	6,914,000	7.7	6,743,000	7.4	-3.9

Note: Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various crimes. Relative percent change is based on unrounded figures.

*No changes were statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

touched by crime in 1987 than in 1975, despite an increase of about 18 million households in the Nation during the 13-year period (table 2).

White households have enjoyed a larger decline since 1975 in the percentage of households touched by crime than black households (figure 2). Between 1975 and 1987 the proportion of white households touched by crime fell by 25%, compared to a 15% decline for black households.

This overall difference in the trends for white and black households is caused primarily by differences in the trends for household theft, which declined for white households but did not change for black households. White and black households had similar declining trends between 1975 and 1987 for violent crime, personal theft, and burglary.

1986-87 comparisons

While households in rural areas were touched by crime to a lesser degree in 1987 than in 1986, crime rates for households in urban and suburban areas did not change during those 2 years. Moreover, between 1986 and 1987 the percentage of households touched by crime was stable for all other demographic variables examined: race, household income, size of household, ethnicity, and region.

Race and ethnicity of household

A higher percentage of black households than white households were touched by crime in 1987 (table 3).[2] Black households were more vulnerable than white households to violent crimes, household theft, and burglary. White households were more vulnerable than black households to personal theft. When personal and household thefts were combined, there was no measurable difference in the proportions of black and white households victimized. Households of other races (Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans) were touched by crime to a degree not measurably different from either white or black households.

Hispanic households were more vulnerable to crime than non-Hispanic households in 1987, primarily because of their greater susceptibility to robbery, burglary, household theft, and motor vehicle theft. There were no differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic households in the percentages victimized by assault or personal theft.

Family income

Households with higher incomes were more susceptible to crime victimization than those with lower incomes, almost entirely because of their greater vulnerability to crimes of personal theft. The percentage of households with incomes of $25,000 or more

[2]For this analysis, the race of the household is considered to be that of the household head.

Households touched by selected crimes, by race of household head, 1975-87

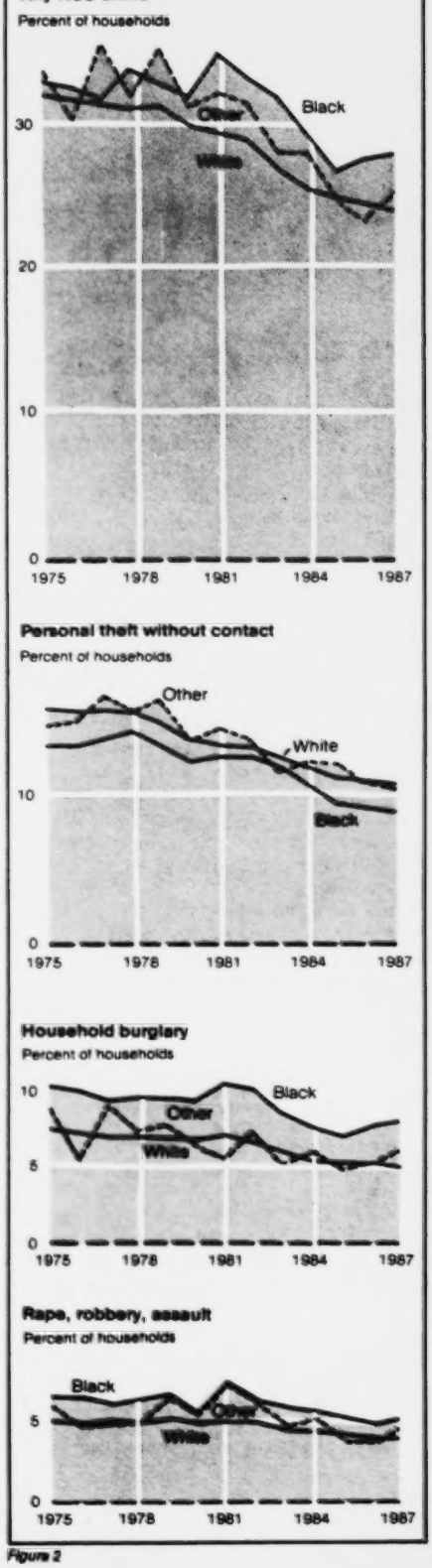

Figure 2

Table 2. Number and percent distribution of households touched by crime, by type of crime, 1975-87

Percent of households touched by:	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Any NCS crime	32.0%	31.5%	31.3%	31.3%	31.3%	30.0%	30.0%	29.3%	27.4%	26.0%	25.0%	24.7%	24.4%
Violent crime	5.8	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.9	5.5	5.9	5.6	5.1	5.0	4.8	4.7	4.6
Rape	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.1	.2	.1	.1	.1
Robbery	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.1	1.0	.9	.9	1.0
Assault	4.5	4.4	4.7	4.6	4.8	4.4	4.7	4.5	4.2	4.1	4.0	3.8	3.7
Personal theft	16.4	16.2	16.3	16.2	15.4	14.2	13.9	13.9	13.0	12.3	11.5	11.2	11.0
Household theft	10.2	10.3	10.2	9.9	10.8	10.4	10.2	9.6	8.9	8.5	8.1	8.0	7.9
Burglary	7.7	7.4	7.2	7.2	7.1	7.0	7.4	6.9	6.1	5.5	5.3	5.3	5.2
Motor vehicle theft	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.5
Households touched by crime (in millions)	23.377	23.504	23.741	24.277	24.730	24.222	24.863	24.989	23.621	22.806	22.191	22.201	22.254
Households in U.S. (in millions)	73.123	74.528	75.904	77.578	78.964	80.622	82.797	85.178	86.146	87.791	88.852	90.014	91.365

Note: Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various crimes.

victimized by personal theft was about 1½ times that of households with incomes under $7,500 (table 4). Despite differing risks for personal theft, households at all income levels appeared equally susceptible to household theft.

Households with incomes below $15,000 experienced violent crimes and burglaries to a greater degree than did households in higher income categories.

Place of residence

In 1987, as in previous years, households in urban areas were the most susceptible to criminal victimization, while households in rural areas were the least susceptible. For most types of crime, suburban households were less vulnerable than urban households but more vulnerable than rural households. There was, however, no measurable difference between the percentage of urban and suburban households victimized by personal theft, nor were there

Table 3. Percent of households touched by crime, by race and ethnicity of household head, 1987

Percent of households touched by:	Race of household head			Ethnicity of household head	
	White	Black	Other	Non-Hispanic	Hispanic
Any NCS crime	23.9%	27.8%	25.0%	24.0%	30.1%
Violent crime	4.4	5.8	5.3	4.5	6.1
Rape	.1	.2	.1	.1	.1
Robbery	.8	2.2	1.2	.9	1.8
Assault	3.7	3.8	4.0	3.7	4.3
Aggravated	1.3	1.7	2.0	1.4	1.7
Simple	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.6	3.2
Total theft	17.2	16.8	16.4	17.0	20.0
Personal theft	11.2	9.6	11.3	10.9	12.4
Household theft	7.7	9.4	7.4	7.8	10.7
Burglary	4.8	7.9	6.8	5.1	6.8
Motor vehicle theft	1.4	2.3	2.0	1.5	2.4
Serious violent crime[a]	2.2	3.8	3.3	2.3	3.5
Crimes of high concern[b]	7.0	10.4	8.8	7.2	10.2

Note: Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various crimes.
[a]Rape, robbery, or aggravated assault.
[b]A rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger, or a burglary.

Table 4. Percent of households touched by crime, by selected characteristics, 1987

Percent of households touched by:	Annual family income: Low (Under $7,500)	Medium ($7,500-$14,999)	Medium ($15,000-$24,999)	High ($25,000 or more)	Place of residence[a]: Urban	Suburban	Rural	Region: Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Any NCS crime	23.9%	22.7%	24.0%	26.9%	28.6%	24.2%	18.5%	19.2%	24.7%	24.3%	29.4%
Violent crime	6.3	5.2	4.3	4.1	5.8	4.1	3.7	3.7	5.0	4.3	5.6
Rape	.2	.1	.1	.1	.1	.1	.1	.1	.1	.1	.1
Robbery	1.6	1.1	.8	.7	1.6	.7	.5	1.0	1.1	.8	1.0
Assault	4.8	4.3	3.4	3.5	4.3	3.4	3.3	2.7	4.0	3.5	4.7
Aggravated	1.8	1.6	1.3	1.2	1.8	1.1	1.3	.8	1.3	1.5	1.9
Simple	3.4	3.0	2.4	2.5	2.9	2.6	2.3	2.0	3.0	2.3	3.3
Total theft	14.9	14.9	17.4	20.1	19.2	17.7	13.0	12.6	17.3	17.1	21.7
Personal theft	8.6	8.8	10.8	14.0	11.9	12.0	8.0	8.1	10.9	10.5	13.4
Household theft	8.2	7.8	8.3	8.2	9.9	7.4	6.2	5.2	7.8	8.1	10.5
Burglary	7.3	5.6	4.7	4.8	6.3	4.7	4.3	3.6	5.1	5.8	5.8
Motor vehicle theft	1.0	1.3	1.5	1.8	2.2	1.5	.6	1.7	1.5	1.3	1.7
Serious violent crime[b]	3.5	2.7	2.2	2.0	3.5	1.8	1.8	1.9	2.3	2.3	2.9
Crimes of high concern[c]	9.8	7.9	6.9	7.0	9.4	6.8	5.6	5.5	7.4	7.7	8.7

Note: Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various crimes.
[a]These estimates are not comparable to estimates for place of residence prior to 1986 due to changes in geographic classification (see footnote 4).
[b]Rape, robbery, or aggravated assault.
[c]A rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger, or a burglary.

measurable differences in the percentages of suburban and rural households victimized by assault or burglary.

In 1987, 1 in 61 urban households had a member who was the victim of a robbery, compared with 1 in 138 suburban households and 1 in 205 rural households.

Region

Households in the Northeast were the least vulnerable to crime in 1987 (19%), while those in the West were the most vulnerable (29%). About 25% of the households in the Midwest and 24% of households in the South were touched by crime in 1987.

With two exceptions, households in all regions were about as likely to have a member suffer a robbery or to have a motor vehicle stolen: Midwestern households were slightly more vulnerable than southern households to have a member who was robbed, and western households were somewhat more likely than southern households to suffer a completed or attempted motor vehicle theft.

Northeastern households were less likely than households in other regions to be victimized by theft or burglary or to have a member victimized by assault. Western households were more vulnerable than households in other regions to crimes of theft and to crimes of high concern (burglary or a violent crime committed by a stranger).

Size of household

In general, the more people in a household, the greater is its vulnerability to crime (table 5). This tendency is more pronounced for personal crimes than for household crimes because larger households have more members at risk for personal crimes, but each household, regardless of size, is at risk for household crimes.

Vulnerability to personal crime victimization generally does not increase at a rate proportional to increases in household size. For example, in 1987 the percentage of six-or-more-person households touched by personal theft was about 2½ times that of one-person households.

Table 5. Percent of households touched by selected crimes, by size of household, 1987

Percent of households touched by:	Number of persons in household			
	1	2-3	4-5	6+
Any NCS crime	17.1%	23.7%	32.1%	36.7%
Violent crime	2.6	4.3	6.7	10.2
Total theft	11.1	16.7	23.6	26.8
Personal theft	6.6	10.8	15.5	16.7
Household theft	5.3	7.5	10.9	15.0
Burglary	4.7	5.8	5.8	6.6
Motor vehicle theft	1.1	1.5	1.8	2.0

One reason why personal crime victimization is not simply proportional to household size is that many households with 2 or more members include children under 12 years of age. Crimes against such young children are not included in the measurement of households touched by crime.[3] In addition, differences in demographic characteristics and lifestyles among different size households will affect the degree to which they are touched by crime because both of these factors are related to crime vulnerability.

The relationship between household size and vulnerability to crime shown in past years also held for 1987:

- Fewer than 1 in 5 single-person households were touched by crime, compared to almost 2 in 5 households with six or more people.
- Households with six or more members were about 4 times more likely than single-person households to be touched by violent crime (10.2% vs. 2.6%) and 2½ times as likely to be touched by personal or household theft (27% vs. 11%).

As in previous years, the percentages of households of different sizes touched by crime varied least for burglary. In 1987, 5% of single-person households were burglarized one or more times, compared to 7% of households with six or more members.

Crimes of high concern

In 1987, 1 in 14 households in the Nation were burglarized or had a member who was the victim of a violent crime (rape, robbery, or assault) committed by a stranger. These crimes, which many people consider the most threatening, have been designated "crimes of high concern" in this report.

In 1987, as in previous years, low-income and urban households were the most likely to be victims of crimes of high concern. Black households were more vulnerable to crimes of high concern than white households but not more vulnerable than households of other races (figure 3). Households in the Northeast were the least vulnerable to crimes of high concern, while households in the West were the most vulnerable. Similar percentages of southern and midwestern households were touched by crimes of high concern.

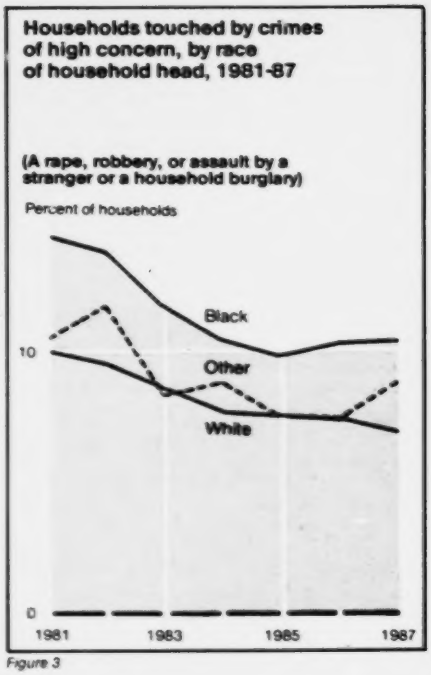

Figure 3

From 1981, when 10.5% of all households were touched by a crime of high concern, the percentage of households touched by such crimes decreased. While the percent of households touched by crimes of high concern in 1987 (7.4%) did not differ from either of the 2 previous years, it was lower than the percent touched in 1984 (8%).

Factors affecting trends

As discussed in previous reports, changes in American society can have an effect on the percentage of households touched by crime. How Americans live affects these estimates because this influences how crime is distributed across society.

American society is extremely mobile. People are constantly moving into and out of different households, creating new households, and merging existing households. For some time the population has been moving away from urban areas into suburban and rural areas. Between 1975 and 1985 the percentage of households located in urban areas fell from 32% to 29% of all households, while suburban and rural households increased from 68% to 71% of all American households.[4]

[3] Crimes against children under age 12 are excluded from the National Crime Survey because asking sensitive questions about victimization might be stressful to the child or the parents, possibly discouraging the adults' participation in the survey.

[4] Estimates of households in urban, suburban, and rural areas for 1986 and 1987 are not comparable to those of previous years. Geographic codes for 1986 and 1987 estimates are based upon 1980 Census definitions, and estimates for earlier years are based upon 1970 Census definitions.

During the 1975-87 period the average American household has decreased in size. One-person households represented 21% of all households in 1975 but 24% in 1987. The percent of households containing six or more people fell from 7% to 3% during this period. These movements shift population from households more vulnerable to crime--larger ones and those in urban areas--to those less vulnerable--smaller ones and those in suburban or rural areas.

The percentage of households touched by crime is probably lower than it would have been had these population shifts not occurred. For example, if the size distribution of American households were the same in 1987 as in 1975, then the estimate of households touched by crime would have been 25.2% rather than 24.4%.[5] This adjusted estimate, however, is still significantly below the 1975 estimate of 32% of households touched by crime.

Methodology

The households-touched-by-crime indicator was developed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 1981 to improve our understanding of the impact of crime on our society.[6] The household was chosen as the unit of analysis because crimes such as burglary are crimes against an entire household and crimes against persons affect not only the victim but also members of the victim's household.

Households-touched-by-crime estimates are derived from National Crime Survey (NCS) statistics on rape, personal robbery, assault, household burglary, personal and household theft, and motor vehicle theft.[7] Because the NCS counts only crimes for which the victim can be interviewed, homicide is not counted. Its exclusion does not noticeably affect the estimates. If each of the homicides during 1987 had touched a different household and if these households had been touched by no other crime (the largest possible effect), then the inclusion of homicides in these findings would not have raised the overall percentage of households touched by crime (24.4%) by as much as .05%.[8]

Other crimes against persons or their households, such as fraud, confidence games, kidnaping, and arson, are not included in this analysis because they are not measured by the NCS.

Traditional measures of crime are in the form of volumes or rates. Data on the volume of crime have limited usefulness because the size of the population is not taken into account. Rates--expressed in the NCS as crimes per 1,000 households or per 1,000 persons--automatically correct for different population sizes, but they do not show whether a given amount of crime is widely spread or highly concentrated within a limited population.

For each type of crime examined, a household is counted only once, regardless of how many times that household was victimized. For example, if a household was burglarized twice and one of its members robbed once during the year, it is counted once for households touched by burglary even though it was victimized twice by burglary. It is also counted once for households touched by robbery. Finally, it is counted once in the overall measure, households touched by crime.

Consequently, the households-touched-by-crime estimate for 1987 (24.4%) is less than the sum of the estimates for households touched by personal crimes (14.4%) and those touched by household crimes (13.4%) because 3.4% of U.S. households were victims of both personal and household crimes. Similarly, because about 1.2% of the U.S. households were touched by both personal theft and violence, the sum of households touched by personal theft (11%) and those touched by violence (4.6%) exceeds the estimate of those touched by personal crime (14.4%).

All data in this bulletin are from the National Crime Survey except those specifically attributed to other sources. The NCS is an ongoing survey conducted for the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Interviews are conducted at 6-month intervals with all occupants age 12 and older in about 49,000 housing units (99,000 persons). Because the NCS does not obtain information about crimes against persons under age 12, households experiencing only these crimes are not included in the estimate of households touched by crime.

The estimates in this bulletin are derived from sample survey data, and they are subject to sampling variation.[9] Because the procedure used to produce estimates of households touched by crime differs from that for victimization rates, the households-touched data have standard errors about 8% higher than those for victimization rates with the same population bases even though they are derived from the same sample survey.

Comparisons presented in this report were determined to be statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, meaning that the estimated difference is greater than twice the standard error. Statements of comparison qualified by language such as "slightly" or "somewhat" indicate statistical significance at the 90% level (1.6 standard errors).

The estimates are also subject to response errors, including crimes that are forgotten or withheld from the interviewer. Such response errors tend to cause understated counts of households touched by crime.[10]

[5] This analysis assumes that in each category of household size the percentage of households touched by crime in 1987 would be unchanged, given the size distribution for all households that existed in 1975.

[6] The Prevalence of Crime, Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, NCJ-75905, March 1981.

[7] These crimes are defined in Measuring Crime, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-75710, February 1981. As used in this report, the term "theft" is synonymous with the term "larceny" used in previous reports.

[8] Preliminary estimates for 1987 indicate that homicides decreased by 4% from the 20,610 that occurred in 1986 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports, 1987).

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletins are prepared principally by the staff of BJS. This bulletin was written by Michael R. Rand. Statistical assistance was provided by Gertrude Thomas. Frank D. Balog edited the bulletin. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administered production, assisted by Tina Dorsey, Jeanne Harris, Christina Roberts, and Yvonne Shields.

May 1988, NCJ-111240

The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program offices and bureaus: the Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

[9] Details of the NCS sample design, the standard error computation, and the customary estimation procedure for victimization rates and counts may be found in Appendix III of the BJS report Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1985, NCJ-104273, May 1987.

[10] A more detailed description of the procedures used to estimate households touched by crime appears in an unpublished memorandum prepared by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The memorandum is available from the author, Michael Rand, c/o Bureau of Justice Statistics, 633 Indiana Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20531, telephone (202) 724-7774.

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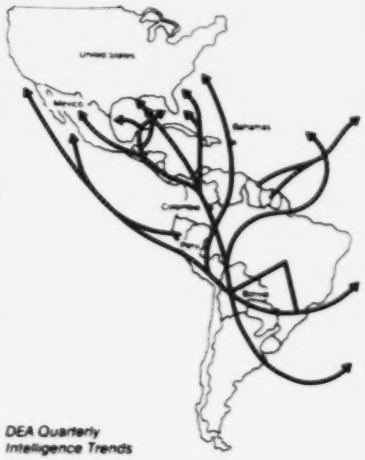

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(revised June 1988)

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